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ABSTRACT

In preparation for an accreditation visit, Hutchinson Community College (HCC), in Kansas, conducted a self-study to determine if their institutional practices were consistent with their mission and undertook other activities to ensure a smooth site visit. A steering committee first prepared a self-study manual which identified the purpose, goals, and format of the self-study report and then prepared the report, which addressed general institutional requirements, basic institutional and demographic data, and plans resulting from the self-study. All full-time employees were given a copy of the report and biographies of the Kansas state appointed accreditation team members prior to the visit. The campus was spruced up in honor of the occasion and a hospitality committee made sure the team was comfortable. During the week following the visit, the steering committee decided to continue to develop strategies to assure implementation of team recommendations. The committee drafted a set of goals and objectives for the school president who reappointed the committee as the "NCA Monitoring Committee," to be responsible for: (1) addressing team recommendations; (2) monitoring the progress of implementation; (3) keeping a written account of accomplishments; and (4) assuring that all recommendations became a part of institutional goals and objectives. (KP)

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Frank Wright
Carolyn Fitzmorris

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THE FINISHING TOUCH: PREPARING THE REPORT, THE STAFF, AND THE CAMPUS FOR THE VISITING TEAM

Frank Wright
Carolyn Fitzmorris

Introduction

From the beginning of the self-study process, we adopted the attitude that this was going to be a positive experience. We told ourselves not to be defensive; if we considered ourselves a good community college, then we should enjoy becoming better. We wanted to use this time of evaluation to our advantage and felt this experience would not only show us where to improve, but it would also give us an opportunity to validate those areas in which we already excelled. From the first meeting, we began to envision the end and focused on how the report should look, how the information would be shared, and how the visiting team would be accommodated.

Issue I: Crafting the Report

The Steering Committee wanted the report to have a professional appearance, much like an "executive report" for business or industry. The resource room at the NCA annual meeting benefited us by giving us ample opportunity to review many styles and cover formats. We were also fortunate to have on our Steering Committee an experienced NCA consultant-evaluator. This input afforded us the opportunity to craft a document that would present the information in an attractive and easy to use format.

The first task of the Steering Committee was to prepare the Self-Study Manual which identified the purpose, the goals, and the format of the report. The next task was to address the General Institutional Requirements (GIRs). This project accomplished two purposes: (1) it satisfied a major requirement; (2) but more importantly, this activity brought the Steering Committee together, as a team, early in the process. At this point the Steering Committee estimated the potential size of the final report and decided upon three separate documents: (1) the main body of the report; (2) the appendices, which contained the GIRs, the Basic Institutional Data Forms, and additional demographic information; and (3) the addenda, which contained our plans and accomplishments which resulted from the self-study prior to the visit by the visiting team.

The outcome for this component of the project was to take a careful, intense, honest, and compassionate look at ourselves so that we could identify the strengths of our institution and capitalize on them, and take the same objective look at our weaknesses and improve them.

Issue II: Sharing the Information and Preparing the Staff and Campus for the Visit

Faculty, Staff and Administrators. All full-time employees were given a copy of the self-study report one month prior to the visit. Additional copies were placed on reserve in every campus building and at each off-campus site so that part-time employees and students also had the opportunity to review them.

One week prior to the visit, two institutional-wide informational meetings were scheduled by the president and the self-study coordinator. The evaluating team's biography and a detailed itinerary of the visit were given to every employee. The Steering Committee was present to answer questions about the report.

Students. We kept our students informed through articles in the school newspaper and announcements by faculty in the classrooms. A special meeting with our student leaders and the visiting team was also scheduled.

Campus and Facilities. We organized three "sparkle days" before the visit. This gave everyone the opportunity to clean their offices, classrooms, storerooms, etc. An appointed committee went on a walking tour of our campus noting areas that could be improved with minor costs. We replaced soiled ceiling tiles, broken blinds and windows; and repainted all dingy class and conference rooms. One office even assigned a team to redecorate. The plan included new carpet, furniture, file cabinets, and bulletin boards. We planted additional trees and flowers. As a result of this effort, the campus is cleaner and more attractive.

The outcome of this component was to inform the total campus of the purpose of the visit, to share with all staff the results of the report, and to involve everyone in the actual visit.

Issue III: Assisting the Visiting Team

Organizing a hospitality committee to make the final arrangements for the visit was one of the best decisions we made. This committee

organized the resource and conference rooms, made transportation and lodging arrangements, scheduled luncheons and meetings, printed name tags, purchased gift baskets, wrote and printed handouts, etc.

Travel and Lodging. While the team members made their own travel arrangements, we met each of their flights and provided transportation to and from the airport. Our school cars were available to the team and drivers were provided when necessary. Motel reservations were made eight months before the visit. The team members were given the necessary motel information and their room requests were given to the motel management. A welcome basket containing fruit, crackers, juice, etc., a name tag and a notebook containing a city and campus map, an itinerary, a welcome letter to our city and campus, a school newspaper, cafeteria tickets, etc. were in each room when the team members arrived.

Resource Room. We moved our resource room into the team's conference room. The resource material was clearly labeled, categorized, and each team member was provided a list of available material. We provided the team with a secretary, two computers and printers, a telephone, office supplies, and a refreshment table.

Luncheons and Scheduled Meetings. The formal meetings were established by the president and the chairpersons of the visiting teams. In Kansas a state appointed team, acting on behalf of the Commissioner of Education, is required to conduct a campus-wide evaluation during the regional accreditation visit. Once the meetings were finalized, the president gave the information to the Steering Committee and the Hospitality Committee for final arrangements.

Our tables at the opening dinner meeting were decorated with plants which were later transferred to the resource and conference room. Our art students prepared the table decorations for the remaining luncheons. Name tags were worn by participants at the luncheons and scheduled meetings.

The outcome of this component was to assure that the visiting team's needs were met in such a way that the members' time and efforts could be easily focused on their responsibilities and assignments.

Issue IV: Campus Mobilization for Follow-up to the Self-Study

During the week following the self-study team visit, the Steering Committee met to determine "what's next." It was decided that the committee would like to continue and work on developing strategies to assure implementation of the recommendations of the visiting team. Each member was given the choice to continue committee participation, and all but one of the eighteen members decided to remain on the committee. The committee drafted a set of goals and objectives and presented them to the president. The president approved the committee's proposal and re-appointed the committee as the "NCA Monitoring Committee." The committee will be responsible for: (1) developing a process to address the implementation of the team's recommendations; (2) monitoring the progress of implementation; (3) keeping a written account of all accomplishments for the 2003 Steering Committee; and (4) assuring that all the recommendations become a part of our institutional goals and objectives.

Conclusion

The ultimate purpose of the self-study was to determine if our institutional practices were consistent with our mission, if our resources had been properly allocated to support these practices, and if we were an institution that merited continuing accreditation. It was our conclusion, and the conclusion of the team, that we are a good community college, but we could be better. In other words, the process worked and we are actively involved in becoming the institution we want to be ten years from now.